Lovely Strange Dark

ULTRABAROQUE DEPROGRAMMER

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CHAPTER 19

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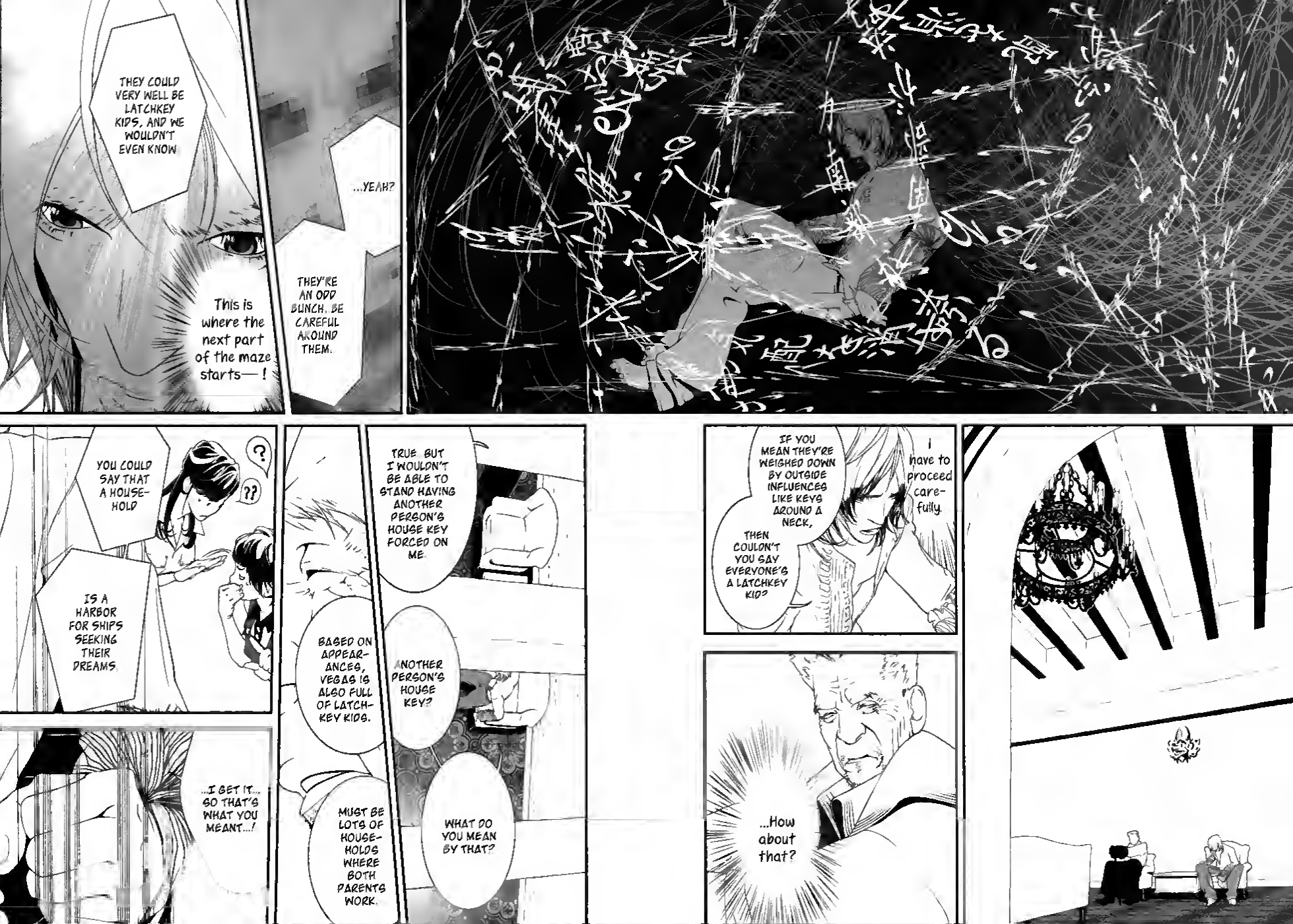
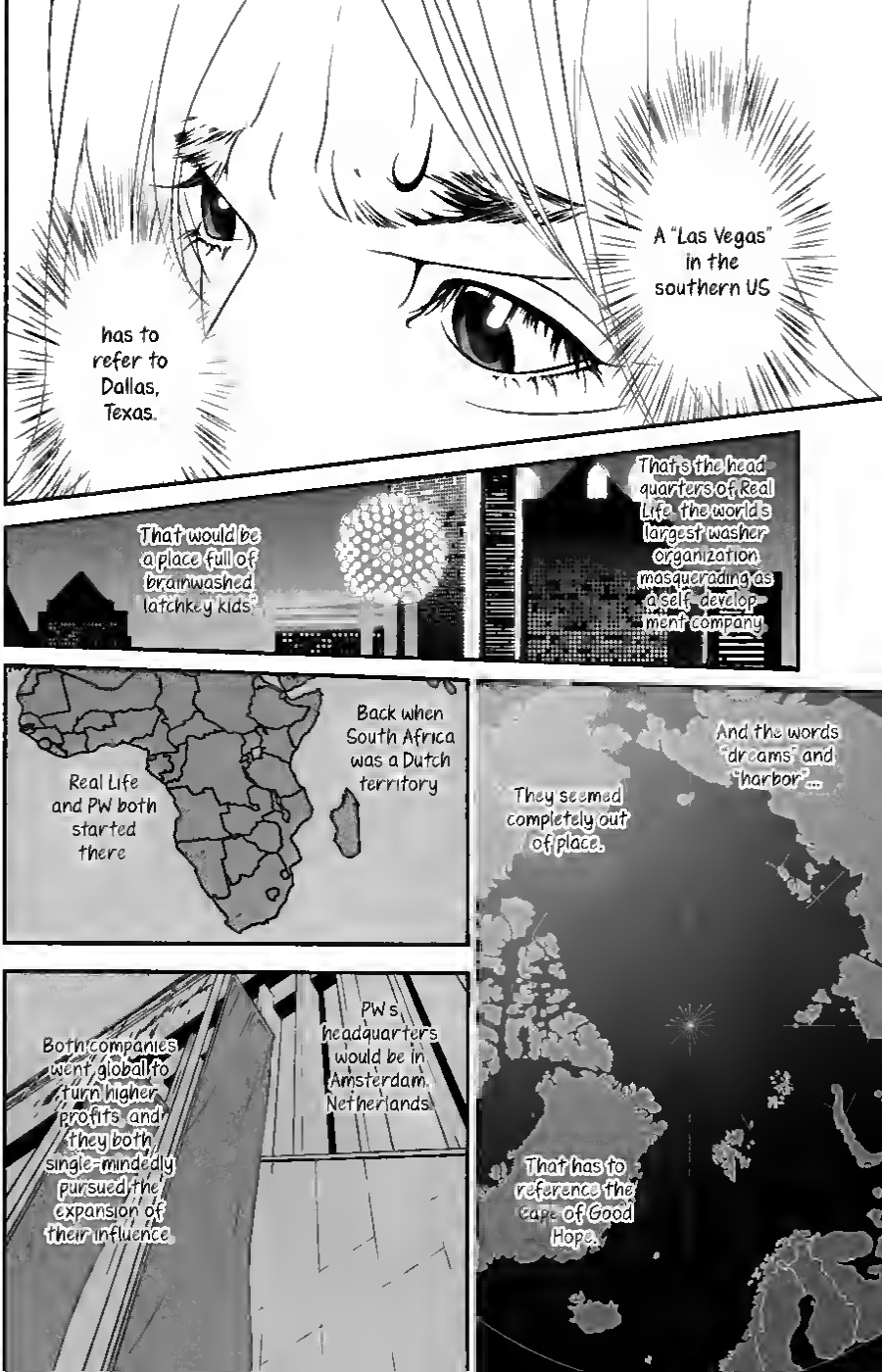
RRRRRR
RRRRRR
...HELLO?

CHAPTER 19 AWAKENING BIRD ②

THE PROTECTOR MENTIONED "LATCHKEY KIDS" WHAT'D HE MEAN BY THAT?
WELL, I THINK
HE MAYBE MEANT THOSE ADULTS WHO SPEAK IN CHILDREN'S VOICES. THEY'VE GOT A STRONG PROTECTION LOCKED INTO THEIR BRAINWASHED MINDS
HEY, WHY DON'T YOU TRY DOING THAT FAKE TALK FROM BEGINNING TO END?
click
I'M RECORDING THIS IN LAS VEGAS.

T/N: Term refers to kids who have a house key and go home alone after school while their parents are still at work.


THEY COULD VERY WELL BE LATCHKEY KIDS, AND WE WOULDN'T EVEN KNOW
This is where the next part of the maze starts—!
...YEAH?
THEY'RE AN ODD BUNCH. BE CAREFUL AROUND THEM.
YOU COULD SAY THAT A HOUSE-HOLD
IS A HARBOR FOR SHIPS SEEKING THEIR DREAMS
?
??
...I GET IT... SO THAT'S WHAT YOU MEANT...!
BASED ON APPEAR-ANCES, VEGAS IS ALSO FULL OF LATCH-KEY KIDS.
MUST BE LOTS OF HOUSE-HOLDS WHERE BOTH PARENTS WORK.
TRUE. BUT I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO STAND HAVING ANOTHER PERSON'S HOUSE KEY FORCED ON ME.
ANOTHER PERSON'S HOUSE KEY?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?
IF YOU MEAN THEY'RE WEIGHED DOWN BY OUTSIDE INFLUENCES LIKE KEYS AROUND A NECK,
THEN COULDN'T YOU SAY EVERYONE'S A LATCHKEY KID?
I have to proceed care-fully.
...How about that?


A "Las Vegas" in the southern US
has to refer to Dallas, Texas.
That's the head quarters of Real Life, the world's largest washer organization masquerading as a self development company.
That would be a place full of brainwashed latchkey kids.
Back when South Africa was a Dutch territory
Real Life and PW both started there
And the words "dreams" and "harbor"...
They seemed completely out of place.
That has to reference the Cape of Good Hope.
PW's headquarters would be in Amsterdam, Netherlands.
Both companies went global to turn higher profits and they both single-mindedly pursued the expansion of their influence.

Another person's house key forced on you...
NOW THEN,
THE HUMAN MIND WORKS IN STRANGE WAYS.
Mind... works...
MY EYELIDS ARE GETTING HEAVY.
MAYBE JETLAG? OR I COULD BE HOMESICK.
IT MAKES YOU AND ME
BOTH FEEL SLEEPY.

YOU MUST FEEL THE SAME.
ISN'T THAT RIGHT?
THAT MUST'VE BEEN IT.
Really were them——
The ones who crashed my system——

click
click
click

Dallas, TEXAS

click
click
..CAN YOU HEAR IT?
...!
HUH? HEAR WHAT?
LISTEN, YOU CAN HEAR THE BIRDS SINGING
I DON'T HEAR THEM.
IT WAKES YOU UP IN THE MORNING
I CAN'T HEAR ANYTHING, MASTER.
THERE'S A BEAUTIFUL VOICE WITH YOU.

Shit——
The maze. I hit a dead end——
I CAN'T HEAR IT!
CRASH

HOW DO YOU ALWAYS KNOW WHERE I AM?
IT'S LIKE MAGIC.
YEAH, I'M FINE.
SWISH
!
Crunch

Stu
WHO'RE YOU?
MOVE IT, OR ELSE!
HUH?

I KNOW
WHO CRASHED ME
HE SAID "MIND WORKS".
IT REALLY WAS PSYCHIC WORK
HUH?
THOSE WEIRD GUYS WHO HANG OUT AT THE WORKSHOP?
THE GUYS WHO CALL THEMSELVES "NOBIRU'S CHILDREN"? NO IDEA WHY...
PW IS A GIANT COMPANY. I DON'T KNOW IF IT WAS ONE OF THEM OR NOT.

...WAIT, ARE YOU THINKING NOBIRU'S INVOLVED AGAIN?
...THIS ISN'T GOOD.
REALLY NOT GOOD.
I'M GONNA DIE
NO WAY I CAN WIN
THEY'RE NOT SOMEONE I CAN TAKE ON ALONE
NO WAY IN HELL
NOT GOOD.
THIS IS BAD.
SHIT.
BAD
BAD
BAD BAD BAD

WHASSAT FOR..?
DID YOU FORGET ALREADY !?
IT'S WHEN YOU GIVE UP THAT THINGS ARE REALLY OVER!
THAT'S WHAT YOU SAID AFTER WE ESCAPED FROM ST AUGUSTINE!
I WAS ALL MESSED UP FROM THE GAG, AND YOU TOLD ME THAT.
"IT'S ALL IN YOUR HEAD!"
"IDEAS ARE THE FABRIC THAT PEOPLE ARE MADE OF!"

WE HAVE A FUTURE.
GET IT OUT OF YOUR HEAD
GO
Lines straight from a self-development seminar.
In my world, phrases like that are stock responses.
I wonder how many times I've said stuff like that without a second thought.
AND IT TRIPS YOU UP. YOU'RE DONE FOR.
IF YOU GET THE WRONG IDEA IN YOUR HEAD

GET IT... OUT OF MY HEAD...
When... did this kid become such a brilliant deprogrammer?
WE... HAVE A FUTURE.
GET OUT OF MY HEAD!
GET OUT OF MY HEAD!
WE HAVE A FUTURE!
WE HAVE A FUTURE!
...THAT'S IT!
YEAH!
BOYS WILL BE BOYS.

SO WHAT HAS THE PROTECTOR TOLD YOU SO FAR?
THAT THE ONE WHO CRASHED ME
IS PSYCHIC WORK, ONE OF THE TWO BIGGEST WASHER FACTIONS.
AND IT SEEMS LIKE THEY GOT TO THE TOP GUY AT THE OTHER BIG ONE, REAL LIFE.
THAT DAVID JONES GUY. AT BEST, HE'S BEEN WASHED WORST CASE SCENARIO, HE'S BEEN CRASHED LIKE ME
REAL LIFE? YOU MEAN THE COMPANY ALL OVER THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS CHANNELS THESE PAST FEW DAYS?
IS IT?
THEY SAID THAT DAVID / GUY DIED
Surely PW wouldn't have had a hand in his death. And yet——
IF THAT'S TRUE, THEN REAL LIFE'S TERRITORY NOW SQUARELY BELONGS TO PW.
YOU THINK THIS CORPORATE STUFF HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH YOU?
WELL, IT CAN'T BE A COINCIDENCE.

WHAT DID HE MEAN ABOUT THE BIRDS SINGING?
ER, I THINK HE'S REALLY TALKING ABOUT BIRDS SINGING THERE
WHAT-EVER,
LET'S JUST LISTEN TO THE REST OF THE MESSAGE
...!
The sound
that lifted me out of a black sea of jumbled words—

...I DID HEAR IT, MASTER.
THAT PARTICULAR "BIRDSONG" YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT——
click
WHEN YOU FIND A ROOSTER THAT SUITS YOU, A BIRD OF AWAKENING.
YOU SHOULD ALWAYS KEEP IT WITH YOU.
SO I HAVE BEEN.
SOME THUGS CAME TO VISIT GOT PUNCHED AND KICKED AND——
BUT
WATCH OUT FOR PARROTS.
PARROTS? OH——

Must be Nobiru.
...I'LL KEEP THAT IN MIND.
WE SHOULD GO AFTER IT TOO!
THEY'RE ALREADY COMING AFTER US!
THE CITY SQUATTERS ARE OUT TO GET IT AND EXPAND THEIR TERRITORY.
THERE'S THIS HUGE HOSPITAL THAT JUST GOT CONDEMNED.
OUTTA MY WAY!
IF WE CAN TAKE THAT, WE AUTOMATICALLY GET A HUGE LEG UP!

SO THEN...
I should consider Nobiru an enemy...?
IT'S ABOUT TIME FOR ME TO LEAVE VEGAS.
I'VE PLACED A RATHER LARGE BET ON THE OUTCOME OF THIS GAME.
CLATTER
IF I LOSE, I MIGHT JUST GET STRUNG UP AND HUNG.
...! IS SOMEONE AFTER YOU, PROTECTOR !?
TATEHARA AND DAVID JONES ARE BOTH DEAD IS THIS ALL RELATED——
A BIRD THAT MIMICS WILL ONLY GET IN THE WAY OF YOUR ROOSTER'S SONG.
IT CAN'T SING THE SONG YOU WANT.
SEEMS THERE'S A NEW PLAYER THERE
I JUST GOT WORD FROM A SPY WE'VE GOT IN THE BLASTERS
THERE'S A KID LEADING THEM, AND HE'S SINGING
...YOU THINK IT'S NOBIRU?
GOTTA BE

...I BET ONE MILLION DOLLARS ON YOU.

極彩魔術様解体屋

ウルトラバロック・デプログラマー

ultrabaroque deprogrammer